



Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed

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Water Supply Policies

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Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed recognizes the need for Marin County to have a secure, safe, environmentally responsible domestic water supply. Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD), the supplier throughout the Corte Madera Creek Watershed, is considering ways to compensate for a water supply deficit. We strongly support a robust conservation program to reduce the need for additional water supplies. In addition to conservation, several alternative water supply sources have been suggested.

As an organization, Friends has taken the following positions on three of the suggested water supply alternatives:

Groundwater

Groundwater is the source of summertime water in our creeks, which currently have inadequate dry season flows and impaired water quality. Because the groundwater resource is an interconnected system, pumping groundwater at any altitude or depth in the watershed would further reduce the amount of water that enters the creeks, and further lower water quality. Urbanization of the watershed has already severely hampered the local creek ecosystem. Pumping groundwater on any scale in the watershed would be an unacceptable additional degradation. In any case, the amount of groundwater that could be pumped from our fragmented and circumscribed freshwater aquifer would meet a negligible percentage of water demand. For these reasons, Friends is against any use of groundwater and creek diversions within our watershed for water supply.

Russian River and Eel River Water Imports

In the recent past, around 19% of our water has been purchased from the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), which obtains water from the Russian and Eel rivers. Local surface water supplies provide around 80%. The remainder of our supply is recycled water.

Water that comes to us from the Russian and Eel rivers does not arrive without an environmental cost. Eel River water is diverted into the Russian River through the Potter Valley Project; the natural flow regimes in both rivers have been forever altered by the dams and diversions that make this transfer possible, and steelhead, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon are paying the price.

The Russian River, the Eel River, and their tributaries are home to steelhead, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon. All are either threatened or endangered. The National Marine Fisheries Service has prepared two biological opinions; one applies to operation of the Potter Valley Project and the second covers water supply, flood control operations, and channel maintenance conducted in the Russian River watershed. Both biological opinions determined that some aspects of these activities threaten steelhead, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon.

In order to supply increasing local demand, SCWA has hoped to find a way to increase its diversions from the Russian River. Most recently a pipeline from Lake Sonoma has been proposed. Plans for this pipeline have recently been abandoned by the SCWA due to cost constraints as well as concerns regarding federal protection of endangered fish on Dry Creek.

Friends opposes further exploitation of Russian River and Eel River water at the expense of those watersheds' wildlife. Furthermore, it is not prudent for Marin to rely on SCWA to provide a significant portion of its future water supply. Friends supports efforts to find alternatives to this supply.

Phoenix Lake

Phoenix Lake Dam was constructed in 1906 and raised in 1908, at which time the total capacity was estimated to be 600 acre-feet (AF). For safety reasons the dam was lowered in 1929 and again in 1969, to a total capacity of approximately 400 AF. Taking into account sedimentation that has reduced the capacity of the lake and the anoxic conditions in the lower part of the lake during the summer, MMWD estimates that Phoenix Lake contains no more than 200 AF that could be used as a water supply. As of January 2009, MMWD estimated that the average annual water demand for consumption is 31,700 AF. Phoenix Lake could less than 1% of the current demand.

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed is studying water quality in Phoenix Lake, its tributaries, and Ross Creek, with the ultimate goal of determining whether it would be feasible to release water from Phoenix Lake, without degrading the habitat value of Phoenix Lake, to benefit steelhead trout that are still found in Ross Creek. If that turns out to be a viable alternative, it is the position of Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed that the beneficial uses to Ross Creek and its steelhead fishery of the small amount of water in Phoenix Lake would far outweigh the minimal benefits of augmenting the domestic water supply from Phoenix Lake.